

**CRASC Technical Committee
Meeting Minutes
January 26, 2006**

1. Call to Order and Approval of Minutes from the Meeting

Chair Caleb Slater called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. and adjourned at 12:28 p.m.

Members of the Technical Committee reviewed the Minutes from the November 7, 2005 meeting. Mr. John Warner identified an error in the Minutes under the Fish Passage Subcommittee Update – Fifteen Mile Falls: The smolt sampler at Moore was re-tested in 2005 (not 2004). Mr. Steve Gephard motion to accept the Minutes as amended. Mr. Warner seconded the motion and the Minutes were approved.

2. Fish Culture Subcommittee Update

Mr. Mickey Novak reported that five hatcheries in the Connecticut River basin produced 10.2 million green eggs this past fall including 758,000 sea-run eggs (the most in the last eight years). He provided the Technical Committee with a table documenting production for each of the hatcheries.

Mr. Novak said that 100 female kelts had been transferred from the Richard Cronin NSS to the North Attleboro NFH. A total of 48 kelts remain at the Richard Cronin NSS including 46 males and two females. Eighteen of the male kelts at Cronin have been reconditioned already.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the University of Massachusetts, and the U.S. Geological Survey have entered into agreements. In 2006, the Mr. Rocco Cipriano will work with UMASS to conduct research using 400 surplus, barren, domestic Atlantic salmon brood stock held in outdoor raceways at the Richard Cronin NSS. Research will focus this year on furunculosis vaccines and later on coldwater disease. Eggs produced from these fish may be used by the program in the future.

Volunteers are still needed to help pick eggs at the White River NFH.

Discussion:

An accurate estimate for the number of fry that will be available for stocking this spring is not yet available.

Schools in western Massachusetts are currently picking up eggs at the Roger Reed SFH. Eggs have already been distributed to Connecticut schools.

In Connecticut, the CTDEP is working once again to incubate 70,000 eyed Atlantic salmon eggs from the Kensington SSH at the private Tripp incubation facility. The fry

that are produced will be used to stock the Eightmile River and several tributaries to the Salmon River.

Mature parr, used in spawning at the Richard Cronin NSS this fall, have been released into the Westfield River below the DSI dam.

Milt from age 2+ domestic brood stock at the Kensington SSH could be used next year to fertilize the domestics being held at the Richard Cronin NSS.

The White River NFH has recently hired some SCA interns and the Assistant Manager position has been advertised as a GS-9/11 Fishery Biologist.

3. Genetics Subcommittee Update

Mr. Gephard initiated a lengthy discussion to assist the Technical Committee in making recommendations with respect to managing kelt brood stock. Ultimately, the Technical Committee agreed to defer the decision on how older female kelts are maintained to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. As a consequence, no additional transfers will be made this year. Next year, the topic will likely be revisited.

4. Salmon Studies Update

Mr. Jay McMenemy noted that the Atlantic salmon fry allocation meeting is scheduled for March 8, 2006 at the white River NFH. Fry production is expected to be at or just below last year's production levels.

Members from the Fish Passage Subcommittee met with personnel from TranCanada yesterday. The Deerfield River radio-tag study is expected to proceed this spring as it has in the past.

The draft U.S. Atlantic Salmon Assessment Committee Report narrative and data tables for the Connecticut River program have been distributed to the Technical Committee members for review. Comments should be provided to Mr. McMenemy or Ms. Janice Rowan.

Mr. Bob Stira reported that the annual smolt estimate study is expected to be conducted this spring.

5. Fish Passage Subcommittee Update

Mr. Warner provided the following updates:

Westfield River - Woronoco - The downstream passage study completed in 2005 must be repeated in 2006. This will require about 300 smolts.

Westfield River - DSI – Last year, smolts were able to escape into the power canal which is a passage concern. This year, the project received a Low Impact Hydro Certification. Certain things like repairs have to be done to maintain the green power certification. So, this may be an incentive for the company to reposition the trash boom, fix and operate the nylon racks so that smolts will be effectively passed around the hydro unit.

Connecticut River - Holyoke – Concerns about undocumented salmon escaping the flume promoted a change in protocol at the lift. In the future, the gate should be closed at night unless there are too many shad that would be jeopardized overnight in the flume. If the gate must be opened, the monitors will observe any salmon, document information on size and distinguishing characteristics and then include the fish in the salmon count since they would not otherwise be counted at the lift. Mr. Gephard provided a draft schedule to help with the logistics of shad transfers. This is a task that had formerly been conducted by Mr. Novak. Mr. Bill Archambault indicated that the task would be completed and that he would determine who would do so [Subsequently, Ms. Rowan was assigned the task]. The Holyoke Gas and Electric Company will be making a decision about staff assistance in handling shad in the tanks but for now we will assume that help can be requested and refused on the daily schedule.

Mr. Stira indicated that staff at the lift would be hired by Mr. Brian Adams again this year though there is discussion about creating a lead position at Greenfield Community College for managing this work in the future

Mr. Ted Castro-Santos suggested that an effort be made to document shad injuries in order to determine whether increased injuries are occurring and if they are coming from the gate or the trap.

Deerfield River - Downstream Passage - TransCanada is working on a final downstream passage plan that will provide for large night time spill to facilitate passage since the bypass systems at the Number 4, 3, and 2 dams are not as effective as needed. Mr. Gephard noted that the same technique might be effective for passing American eels.

Deerfield River - Upstream Passage - The need for upstream fish passage at the Number 2 dam was partially triggered in 2005. Passage will be required if four more adult salmon reach the dam in 2006. TransCanada has stated that they believe only three of the five salmon that reached the Number 2 dam in 2005 really wanted to be there. The agencies do not necessarily concur, but have taken TransCanada's position under advisement. The agencies will not press this issue unless and until the trigger is hit again this year.

Connecticut River - Fifteen Mile Falls - Studies at the McIndoes dam reveal 96% turbine survival for smolts and 100% spillgate and bypass survival. As a result, TransCanada has proposed to discontinue use of the bypass. However, the agencies must also take into account the fact that these smolts must pass a few dams before reaching McIndoes and quite a few more afterward. Since smolt survival is impacted by dam passage and delays

associated with passing dams, it is all the more important that we strive for the highest passage success possible using reasonably available technology.

Connecticut River – Fifteen Mile Falls - In another study at the Moore dam, TransCanada radio-tagged and released salmon smolts. Most of the fish were recorded including 23% of the smolts which were later captured at the sampler and 71% of the smolts which were documented nearby. The results also indicate that there was substantial downstream movement of wild smolts in the system. They also show that there is a flow attraction problem at the entrance rather than a problem with survival or movement through the reservoir.

Connecticut River – Vernon dam – TransCanada has proposed new hydro units for the Vernon dam. Upstream passage concerns for the proposal have already been addressed but some issues with respect to downstream passage remain.

Connecticut River - Turners Falls dam - Northeast Generation Services is working on the design for a new entrance at the gatehouse despite the expected sale of the project later this year. Construction is not expected to start until 2007 with completion in 2008.

6. Shad Studies Subcommittee Update

Mr. Slater reported that he would be working on the letter requested by the Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission on the importance of shad restoration.

The Committee briefly discussed the model for estimating the whole river shad population and what is needed to ensure robust estimates. The model requires field ground-truthing since major changes have been made to the Holyoke fish passage system. Significant effort will have to be made in the form of either a pound net or a gill net and mark-recapture study. Recaptures might be obtained at the Holyoke fishlift, from anglers and/or commercial netters.

Mr. Gephard reported that the CTDEP is working with the University of Connecticut on a river herring/striped bass study. Gill netting was found to be less effective than they hoped it would be and they were hoping to collect fish this spring with an electrofishing boat. Ms. Rowan said that she has been speaking with Mr. Eric Schultz and Mr. Justin Davis about an agreement with UCONN for their use of the Sunderland FRO boat. This would require UCONN to pay for the operating, maintenance and repair costs for the boat and equipment. They would also be required to meet various safety requirements and certifications which they are attempting to do. Mr. Slater and Mr. Gabe Gries thought this could be helpful if it would also facilitate collections for blueback herring restoration in the Ashuelot and Westfield Rivers. It is also an opportunity to collect genetic samples if any more are required.

Mr. Ted Castro-Santos said that he would be collecting alewife from Town Brook in Plymouth, MA this spring. Mr. Gephard expressed an interest in collecting genetic

samples from these fish. The CTDEP is working with Yale University on some alewife research and additional genetic samples would be welcome.

Mr. Castro-Santos said that he would also be collecting blueback herring from the Charles River in Boston, MA. The Technical Committee was interested in genetic samples from these fish as a comparison to the baseline genetics already collected from herring in the mainstem Connecticut River and as a possible replacement for samples from the Mowhawk River in New York.

Mr. Slater reported that fishing for herring has been illegal in Connecticut for several years. Massachusetts closed the fishery this year making possession of herring bait illegal. It is expected that Rhode Island will also close their fishery. There is hope that other states on the east coast will adopt similar regulation. Once harvest is reduced or eliminated, we can begin to look at other causes for the dramatic decline in the herring population.

7. New England Joint Ventures

Mr. Slater reported that the New England State Directors met at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Office in Hadley, MA on January 9, 2006. At that meeting, they decided that advocacy for Atlantic salmon restoration should proceed as a regional initiative rather than on a river-by-river basis. Mr. Slater was first charged with the task of compiling a statement of needs and budget table for the Connecticut River program. He is currently working with folks in the Merrimack and Maine programs to consolidate a New England-wide statement of need and budget table. The Directors will review this document in February and then decide where to take the initiative from there.

8. Other Business

Congressional Outreach

Ms. Rowan reported that Senator Leahy hosted a New England Interjurisdictional Fisheries Forum in Washington, D.C. on January 20, 2006. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fisheries staff presentation focused on conservation of salmon, shad and herring in New England. The idea was to build support for anadromous fish restoration regionally and to encourage a New England legislative caucus. Hopefully, this piqued the interest of the 18 people in attendance which included staff from Senators Lieberman, Kennedy, Kerry, Jeffords, Sununu and Collins offices as well as staff from Representatives Bass, Reed, Tierney, Delahunt, and Lynch's offices. This forum will be followed by individual office visits the week of February 6.

School Programs

Ms. Rowan summarized a total of 114 schools and more than a couple of thousand students in the Connecticut River basin are now involved in hatching and rearing Atlantic salmon in the classroom. The Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission member agencies provide the eggs required for these environmental science-based programs, then our partners help deliver the programs.

Sixty-two schools will participate in the Connecticut River Salmon Association's school program this year. Thirty-four schools will be participating in western Massachusetts. Another 20 schools in Vermont and seven schools in New Hampshire are involved. A handful of other schools in Vermont and New Hampshire are now using a similar program to rear and stock trout.

Fish Requests

Mr. Castro-Santos provided the Technical Committee with a heads-up that the USGS-Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center might be hosting a UMASS Darwin Fellow this Fall. If this comes about, she will be requesting 100-200 parr-smolt sized Atlantic salmon for studies that will address Atlantic salmon energetics and lateral line development at smoltification. The Technical Committee agreed that this would be an appropriate use of fish and encouraged a formal request when the time comes.

Mr. Warner indicated that about 300 smolts would be required for downstream passage studies at the Woronoco dam on the Westfield River and another 150-200 smolts are needed for the Fifteen Mile Falls study. In both cases the smolts would come from the Pittsford NFH.

Mr. Dan Kuzmeskus informed the Committee that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working on an agreement with the Berkshire Foundation to run the Berkshire National Trout Hatchery using a volunteer workforce supervised by an as yet unidentified Service Project Leader. In this capacity, the Service can maintain the hatchery for production such that it contributes to the Connecticut River basin fish restoration program while providing opportunities for outreach, education and Congressional support. To initiate the program, Mr. Kuzmeskus requested 15,000-20,000 eyed Atlantic salmon eggs from the White River NFH for the production of 2-year smolts at the Berkshire National Trout Hatchery. This promoted a discussion during which the following points were addressed: The operation costs of the hatchery will be raised by the Berkshire Foundation through donations. Limited expenses may also be covered by the Service budget, costs not expected to exceed the amount currently budgeted for the station in caretaker status. This project will not divert funding from the existing Connecticut River program. Mr. Reed Baldwin from the Western Massachusetts Center for Sustainable Aquaculture is an experienced aquaculturist who will be the on-site, day-to-day manager working with 6-14 volunteers/day. The Service supervisor will make weekly or bi-weekly visits to the hatchery to ensure that operations are going smoothly. This added assignment will not impact that Project Leader's current duties within the Program. Smolt production may be problematic because of water supply conditions. The initial request is a starting point for the hatchery, production may be increased in the future or the focus may shift to fry production or kelt reconditioning, or some other activity as needed by the program to advance the program. Hatchery inspections in 2002, 2003, and 2004 demonstrate that the hatchery was clean. No assessment was completed in 2005.

The Technical Committee approved the request on the condition that the Smolt Advisory Committee has a role in guiding and evaluating the effort.

Smolt Evaluation

Mr. Gephard noted that the 2006 smolt year class at the Pittsford NFH needed to be evaluated prior to release. It was agreed that a fin evaluation should be conducted the first week of February. Staff from the CTDEP and VTFW volunteered to try to conduct the assessment next week.

Fish Passage Funding

Mr. Kuzmeskus reported that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is funding fish passage projects in 2006 a little bit differently than has been the routine in the past. Partners are requested to complete a more detailed proposal. Available funding is expected to be less than or equal to \$25,000/project. Proposals must be submitted before the end of February.

Eel Management Plan

Ms. Rowan said that Mr. Scott Craig has indicated that a draft Connecticut River Basin Eel Management Plan is expected in March 2006. He has noted that data is still needed from Connecticut and Massachusetts in order to make this happen.

Attendance

Janice Rowan	USFWS
Caleb Slater	MADFW
Steve Gephard	CTDEP
Jay McMenemy	VTFW
Steve Roy	USFS
Lynn DeWald	VT Yankee
Jennifer Griffin	Normandeau Assoc.
Ted Castro-Santos	USGS-CAFRC
Dan Kuzmeskus	USFWS
Bill Archambault	USFWS
Jon Truebe	Lakeside Engineering
Bob Stira	Northeast Generation Services
Dan Marchant	MADFW
Jason Johnson	MADFW
Bruce Williams	USACoE
Joseph P. Faloretti	USACoE
Darleen Cutting	USFWS
Mickey Novak	USFWS
Larry Lofton	USFWS
Gabe Gries	NHFG
John Warner	USFWS
Henry Bouchard	USFWS